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ALBERT D. J. CASHIER AND THE NINETY-FIFTH ILLINOIS INFANTRY (1844-1915)

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M. C. L.

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Woman Soldier in 95th Ill.



ALBERT D. J. CASHIER
OF
COMPANY G, 95TH ILLINOIS REGIMENT

Photographed November, 1864



ALBERT D. J. CASHIER
OF
COMPANY G, 95TH ILLINOIS REGIMENT

Photographed July, 1913

INTRODUCTION

"Albert D. J. Cashier and the Ninety-fifth Illinois Infantry (1844-1915)" primarily concerns the study of a woman who, disguised as a man, fought in the Civil War with the Ninety-fifth Illinois without having her secret discovered. It is indeed challenging to study the life of an economically underprivileged person who lived a semi-public life as a person of the opposite sex. The specific aspects dealt with in this study are the movements and involvements of the Ninety-fifth Illinois in the war; the conditions under which Cashier and his regiment lived, particularly those circumstances which allowed Cashier to pose successfully as a man; Cashier's life in Central Illinois after the war; Cashier's probable origin; and, finally, the problems involved in settling the estate of a person who had lived under an alias most of her life.

Since Private Albert Cashier was with the Ninety-fifth Illinois Infantry from its inception until its members were mustered out, the experiences of the regiment and Cashier were shared in common. The movements and involvements of the Ninety-fifth Illinois Infantry Volunteers included participation in the siege and capture of Vicksburg, the Red River expedition, and the battle of Guntown. These activities, as well as the minor

involvements, are chronicled in two books. The first is a regimental history which was written by Wales W. Wood and was published in 1865.[1]

Wales W. Wood was a college graduate, Phi Beta Kappa, from New York who had come to Illinois to study, then practice, law. Having settled in Belvidere, Illinois, he was admitted to the bar in 1860.[2] He enlisted in the Ninety-fifth Illinois in 1863 and was elected its adjutant, serving in that position throughout the regiment's service. Wood's regimental history contains no documentation, but is based largely on the author's own memory, his use of diaries kept by members of the regiment, and his consultation with other members of the regiment. Since the account was begun while the men were still in service and the men's memories were still fresh, it contains a notable level of accuracy when compared with official records.

The other book which specifically deals with the Ninety-fifth Illinois is a compilation of letters of

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[1]Wales W. Wood, A History of the Ninety-fifth Illinois Infantry Volunteers (Chicago: Tribune Company's Book and Job Printing Office, 1865).

[2]Newton Bateman, Paul Selby, and Richard V. Carpenter, Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of Boone County (2 vols.; Chicago: Munsell Publishing Company, 1909), II, 938.

Sergeant Onley Andrus, Company D. These letters, 47 from Andrus and 14 to him, contain valuable insights into the day-to-day life of the men, as well as a chronology of troop movements during the war.[3] In addition, the editor of the Andrus letters, Fred Albert Shannon, supplies a very useful map which indicates the specific towns and cities visited by the Ninety-fifth.[4]

A third source of information is the files of the United States Pension Bureau. Cashier, the only woman known to have received a Civil War pension, was investigated thoroughly; the government wanted to make sure that the woman applying for a pension was indeed the person who served with the Ninety-fifth Illinois. As a result, the pension file is replete with depositions taken from members of the regiment who were asked to identify Cashier (either by seeing him in person or by viewing a photograph). These men were asked to recall certain facts about Cashier and his service; and though many of the

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[3]Fred Albert Shannon, ed., The Civil War Letters of Sergeant Onley Andrus (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1947). Andrus served throughout the war as a Sergeant, but was mustered out as a First Sergeant; see Illinois, Adjutant General, Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois (9 vols.; Springfield: Phillips Brothers State Printers, 1901), V, 417.

[4]Shannon, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

comments were quite vague, some revelations were detailed and helpful.[5]

Also of great value are the local newspaper accounts. The Ninety-fifth contained men mostly from Boone and McHenry Counties; since Belvidere is in Boone County, the _Belvidere Standard_ constantly covered the actions of the Ninety-fifth and frequently printed correspondence written to the paper or to local individuals from members of the regiment.[6]

Diaries or other accounts written by members of other regiments whose activities coincided with those of the Ninety-fifth Illinois Infantry have also been consulted in order to help complete the picture of daily life which is necessary in this study.

The author also made use of official records and officers' accounts of the war as related in _War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies_;[7] _Battles and Leaders of the_

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[5] U.S., Bureau of Pensions, File on Albert D. J. Cashier. Copies of file may be obtained by writing to the Pension Bureau.

[6] _Belvidere Standard_ (Belvidere, Illinois), August 5, 1862-September 26, 1865.

[7] U.S., War Records Office, _The War of the Rebellion; A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies_ (128 vols.; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1881-1901).

Civil War;[8] and A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion.[9] These works give further verification of accounts of battles, campaigns, and troop movements.

The problem of chronicling the activities of Albert D. J. Cashier is not so easy; in fact, the simple selection of the pronoun with which to refer to Cashier is somewhat difficult. In this study Cashier is referred to with masculine pronouns during the discussion of the time in which Cashier was believed to be a man. At the time in this study that Cashier's true sexual identity becomes generally known, a switch to feminine pronouns is made.

The major sources of information about Cashier's antebellum life are newspapers, interviews, and court records. Cashier is known to have migrated from Belvidere, Illinois, to Saunemin, Illinois, shortly after the war, and to have lived in Saunemin, a town in Livingston County, until 1911. One useful newspaper is the Pontiac Daily Leader.[10] The Leader contains a limited amount of source material since Albert D. J. Cashier was a nondescript

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[8]Clarence C. Buel and Robert U. Johnson, eds., Battles and Leaders of the Civil War (4 vols.; New York: The Century Company, 1884-1888).

[9]Frederick H. Dyer, A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion (3 vols.; New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959).

[10]Pontiac Daily Leader (Pontiac, Illinois), 1910-1915.

person until the public learned of her true sexual identity in 1910. In addition, the Bloomington <u>Daily Pantagraph</u> did, in the 1950's and 1960's, print several articles concerning Cashier's life.

Since Cashier was still living in the early part of this century, there remain people who remember Cashier and are able to relate his activities. The major difficulty with the information gained from interviews is that memories get hazy, inaccuracies get started, and myths grow; therefore, the author has attempted to cross-check all significant information related to Cashier's life.

The court records which are relevant to this study are on file in Adams County Courthouse in Quincy, Illinois. These records concern Albert D. J. Cashier's confinement in the Quincy Soldiers' and Sailors' Home and her subsequent commitment to the Watertown State Hospital in East Moline, as well as the records of the search for Cashier's heir.[11] These papers reveal the discrepancy between the private realization of her female status and the legal documentation of her male identity. They also contain information concerning her possible origin, though Cashier was legally ruled to have had no heirs.

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[11]Illinois, Adams County, Court Records.

The presentation of the study will be as follows: The Formation of the Regiment and Its Movement to Memphis, From the Vicksburg Campaign to Mustering Out, Cashier's Life After the War, The Search for Heirs, and Conclusion.

Materials used for this study were found in the following libraries: Belvidere Public Library, Belvidere, Illinois; Daily Pantagraph Library, Bloomington, Illinois; Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield, Illinois; McLean County Historical Library, Bloomington, Illinois; Milner Library, Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois; Pontiac Public Library, Pontiac, Illinois.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The study of Albert D. J. Cashier has brought into focus the life of a common individual which had, indeed, uncommon facets. As a soldier, Albert D. J. Cashier, Company G of the Ninety-fifth Illinois Infantry, traversed 9,960 miles and helped the Union to gain control of the Mississippi River.[1] Her regiment was active in the siege of Vicksburg, receiving the special honor of marching into the city among the first units. The Ninety-fifth Illinois accompanied Major General Nathaniel Banks on the Red River expedition, though the regiment, assigned to the river branch of the campaign, missed the conflict at Pleasant Hill, Louisiana, which convinced Banks to retreat. At the battle of Guntown, three successive commanding officers had to be taken from the field, dead or seriously wounded, and the ranks of Cashier's regiment were greatly reduced. Subsequently, the regiment had to rest, regroup, and recruit before it could embark on its final tour. At the last significant engagement of the war, Cashier's regiment again proved its skill and valor

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[1] Chicago Daily News (Chicago, Illinois), March 14, 1957, p. 30.

by being the first to storm and enter the Confederate stronghold of Spanish Fort. After finishing an assignment to guard Northern Alabama towns, the Ninety-fifth Illinois Infantry was mustered out of service on August 17, 1865.

During the war, Cashier was not a controversial figure; she rated no mention in the text of the regimental history, but was listed among the men of the regiment. Her presence in the regiment, however, made the day the regiment was mustered out, uneventful as it seemed, a day of unusual significance; for Albert D. J. Cashier was a woman who had served all three years in the war disguised as a man. Until August 17, 1865, there was always a chance that injury or accident might disclose the presence of this woman and, as a result, make her only one of the several women who had enlisted, only to be revealed and sent home. But Albert D. J. Cashier's secret was not discovered until over 45 years later. She was, as far as is known, the only woman to complete her tour of duty in the Civil War, the only woman to be mustered out with her regiment.

That such a guise could succeed reveals the deficiencies of the military system; deficiencies, for instance, in medical examination and hygiene. The difficulties that must have been faced by Cashier in daily life, experiences of traveling and living with a

group of men for three years, are almost too numerous to imagine. In addition, one can only speculate as to the inner life of a person who chose such an unusual role.

After the war Cashier maintained the masculine role. Though her life for about four years after the war is somewhat obscure, in 1869 Albert D. J. Cashier settled in the small Central Illinois town of Saunemin. She stayed in this Livingston County location for about 42 years. Albert--herder, lamplighter, janitor, general handyman--was notably eccentric; but the people of the town called on her services, often paying her with meals and, at times, a place to sleep, never really suspecting that this peculiar man was in fact a woman.

Albert has become a legend in Saunemin, one of the few historical figures the town can claim. She is remembered by many with affection and retrospective amazement. Stories about her, many undoubtedly fabricated or romanticized, abound; and special attention is given to Memorial Day services, largely because among the long list of names read is the name, Albert D. J. Cashier. The name itself reveals nothing of her story, but it reminds those who know it and gives them a chance to tell the new generation about it. Often, in the telling, many who are frustrated by not knowing who Cashier really was and who find calling a woman Albert uncomfortable resort

to naming her Alberta D. J. Cashier, a simple but unlikely solution.

The people of Saunemin have long enjoyed showing curious travelers, and reporters, Albert's gravesite. During this decade action was taken to preserve her house and put it on display. The house, a one-room cottage, had been moved from its location near the Christian Church shortly after Cashier left Saunemin.[2] Eventually the man who had bought the house, E. G. Bennett, sold it to Edwin R. Smith, who moved it to his property and converted it into an addition to his brooder. After Smith's retirement, the brooder was idle and the owner decided to tear it down; but Smith was convinced to leave the former house intact.[3] Clarence Stoller of Gridley, Illinois, then the president of Central States Thresherman's Reunion, had intervened and Smith donated the house to the Threshermen, giving them permission to move Albert's house to the 4-H Park in Pontiac, Illinois, where it could be displayed. Plans were made to have Ida M. Lannon and Mrs. Edward Banker, a granddaughter of P. H. Lannon, decide what

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[2]The Story of Jennie Hodges alias "Albert Cashier" (Pontiac, Illinois: Central States Threshermen's Reunion, n.d.), (n.p.).

[3]Edwin Smith, personal interview, Pontiac, Illinois, April 10, 1969.

furnishings should be included so that the house would be furnished as it was when Cashier lived there. Miss Lannon was able to supply the only known piece of furniture actually in Cashier's house which is still in existence, a rocking chair.[4] In August, 1962, the house was moved and restored.[5] It is open to the public each year during the Threshermen's Reunion.

Shortly after Cashier left Saunemin, still known to most people as a man, her masquerade was disclosed and was widely publicized. The Bureau of Pensions, which had granted her a pension shortly before the turn of the century with no apparent realization that she was a woman, conducted an investigation which confirmed her war service and admitted that, according to its records, Albert D. J. Cashier was the only woman known to have received a pension for fighting in the Civil War.[6]

This study shows the flaws in a system which admitted an individual was a woman, but continued to record her sex as male. Both the Pension Bureau records and the records at the Illinois Soldiers' and Sailors' Home, as

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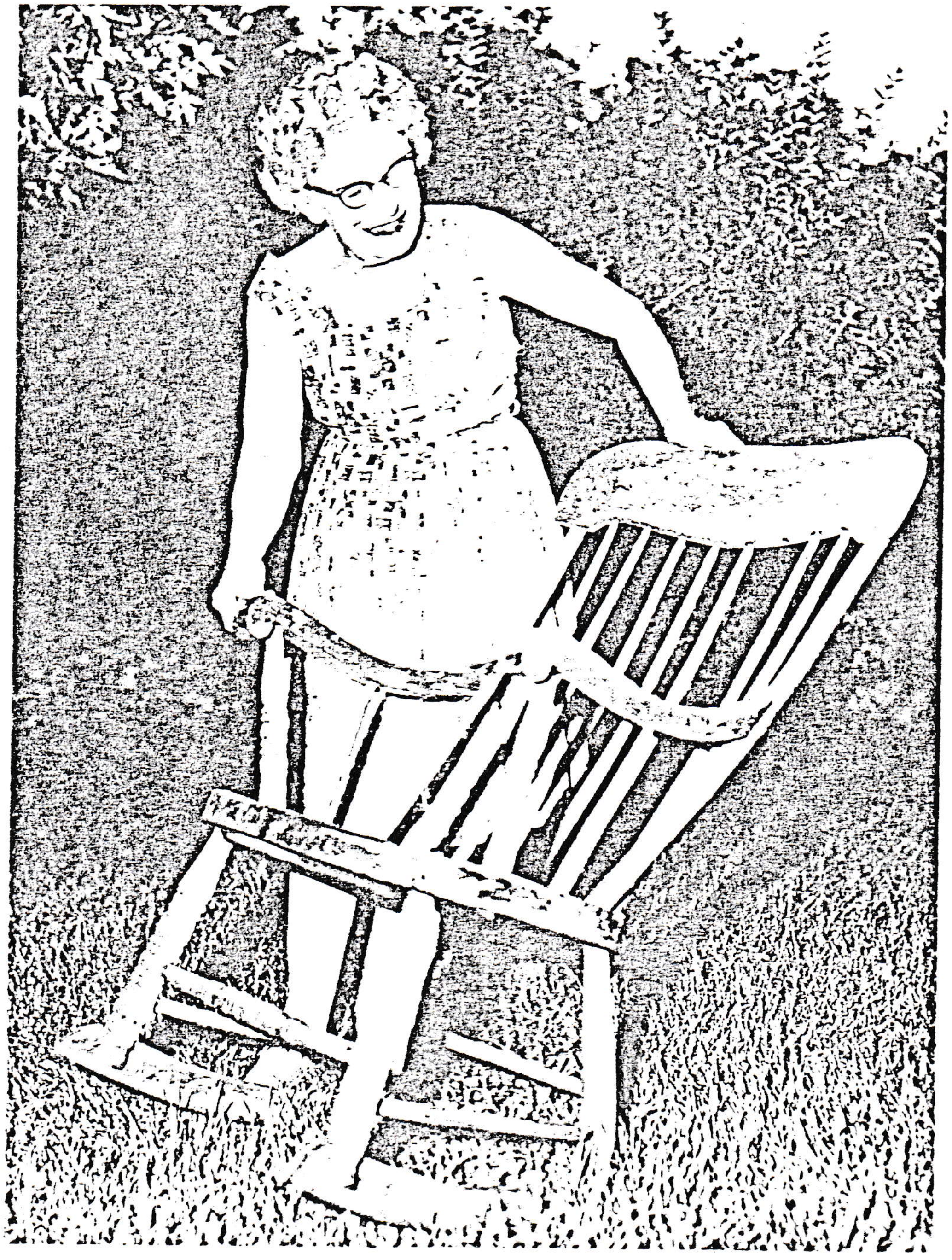
[4] <u>Daily Pantagraph</u> (Bloomington, Illinois), June 29, 1962, p. 7.

[5] <u>Daily Pantagraph</u>, August 30, 1962, p. 20.

[6] <u>Daily Pantagraph</u>, June 29, 1962, p. 7.

PLATE 5

IDA M. LANNON EXHIBITS CHAIR
ONCE BELONGING TO CASHIER



(Pantagraph Photo)

well as all reports of Adams County previous to Cashier's death, maintain official consideration of Cashier as a man; an unusual situation, indeed.

The search for heirs of Cashier served only to exhibit the confusion and contradictions encountered in trying to discover the background of a person who switched both name and sex role for the major part of her life. Cashier's practice of telling varying accounts and explanations only served to prevent any certain knowledge of her real origin and motivation. An attempt to discover such information is especially difficult because Cashier lived in an age before people were constantly required to document their very existence.

The study of the life of Albert D. J. Cashier, the only woman to have received a Civil War pension, shows some of the difficulties that may be encountered in the study of local history. This is especially true concerning her final years and settlement of her estate. Official records often do not state things that are privately known and acknowledged. Or they may record only one side of a dialogue, telling none of the explanations or replies given by the other side. In such circumstances, the unusual facts that are known of the life of Cashier offer many opportunities for supposition

and conjecture about the unknown facts of her motivation and personality. In that regard, she remains a person of interest to the community and, in some degree, to the nation, but one that is essentially unknown.


ALBERT



For one of these soldiers of Company G, 95th Illinois Infantry, camp life was more than exotic. It was a constant tension as he attempted to conceal a perhaps scandalous secret. For the soldier on the right, Private Albert Cashier, is in fact a woman. Born in Ireland, her feminine name was Hodgers, but all her life she was known as Albert J. Cashier. She not only successfully maintained her pose, serving well particularly at Vicksburg, but she eluded detection until 1911 when an automobile caused her hospitalization. It took a twentieth-century machine to expose the life-long sham of a patriotic woman who for so long fooled the men of her own century. (SPENCER H. WATTERSON, PONTIAC, ILLINOIS)